

Community News

White Sands teddy bear spreads space to school with flight on STS-90

By John Ira Petty

Some New Mexico school children were absolutely bearish, in the most positive sense, about the STS-90 flight on *Columbia*. Their reason: One of their own was aboard.

The pilot, commander, three mission specialists and two payload specialists were joined by a quiet, undemanding yet still contributing crew member—ursine specialist Axon. The small teddy bear from JSC's White Sands Test Facility, was a companion of Mission Specialist Kay Hire.

"You have to experience it to believe it," Axon said in a recent, exclusive interview with the Space News Roundup. "I had no idea space flight, and fame, could be so exciting."

Axon and her two backup siblings, Chuck and Yuri, spent months training with Hire and other astronauts at JSC and Kennedy Space Center.

All three are based at JSC's White Sands Test Facility and all are ambassadors for the Science Advisor (SCIAD) program. Since 1990, SCIAD has paired volunteer science professionals from the community with local elementary and middle school teachers in a partnership to improve math, science, and technology education.

Hire offered to support SCIAD by flying one of the bears on her mission. STS-90 was a 16-day flight of NeuroLab, dedicated to the study of nervous system development and function in the absence of gravity.

The adventures of all three bears were documented on their own website, <http://www.wstf.nasa.gov/bear> by Allied-Signal/WSTF employees David Huskey and Tom Richie, with text and photographs provided by Hire and White Sands' Michelle Rucker.

Hundreds of Las Cruces school children monitored the bears' entertaining pre-flight activities, which included launch acceleration and microgravity flight simulations, NeuroLab science experiments, and even using the famous "space potty."

For the actual mission, space aboard *Columbia* was at a premium, so Axon had to lose some weight. Her stuffing was removed, and she flew in a form-fitting space attire - some more skeptical individuals might call it a plastic vacuum bag.

Axon owes her identity to the Las Cruces children. They were asked to name two of the three bears. (NASA already had named Chuck for test pilot Chuck Yeager.)

The winning entry was submitted by Julie Thomas' class at Mesilla Elementary. Axon is the part of a nerve cell that carries impulses away from the body of the cell.

Backup Yuri was named by Valerie Rodriguez's first grade class at Jornada Elementary, for Yuri Gagarin, the Soviet cosmonaut. The prize for the two winning classes was an invitation to visit White Sands to meet Hire during her post-flight tour.

Onsite Insights



JSC Photo by Mark Sowa

Sue Leibert takes stock in the Bay Area Turning Point food pantry. She recently received the Houston Federal Business Association's Professional/Scientific Public Service Award, in part for her work there.

A chance to give back

JSC's Sue Leibert helps many in community navigate turning point

By John Ira Petty

The criteria were job competence, impact, community service and special efforts. Sue Leibert of Human Resources ranked right up there in all four.

She was named winner of the Professional/Scientific Public Service Award sponsored by the Houston Federal Business Association. Three other JSC employees also won awards, designed to recognize military and civilian government employees in the Houston-Galveston area.

One big reason Leibert won, in addition to being good at her job, was her work to help abused spouses and their children put their lives back together.

At JSC, Leibert, a 15-year human resources veteran, works as senior executive services coordinator and human resources representative for employees in the Space Shuttle Program, the Phase 1 Program and the EVA Project Office.

She's also president-elect and a member of the board of Bay Area Turning Point, an organization founded in 1961 to help victims of family violence. It's geared toward women

and children, although men are abuse victims, too.

The organization opened its shelter June 1, 1996, about the time Leibert joined. The first surprise, she said, was the amount of abuse that goes on in the relatively affluent Clear Lake area.

"The shelter can serve 50 women and children and it is typically full," she said. Those who use its services are from all economic levels. On average each woman resident brings two children. The organization finds shelter for male abuse victims elsewhere.

Abuse can be emotional or monetary as well as physical, she said. Many victims keep trying to change the abuser's controlling, demeaning, isolating behavior to preserve the relationship.

Leibert became involved in the organization when Jennifer Mason-Korecki who works in the International Partners Office was president-elect two years ago. "She needed someone with a human resources background to be on the board, which numbers 16 to 18. "By the time she left my office I was the HR committee chair and on the board," Leibert said.

Bay Area Turning Point's 20 professional staff members also provide non-residential services, work with high

school students and support and counsel sexual assault victims.

Leibert has found a cause, for a number of reasons.

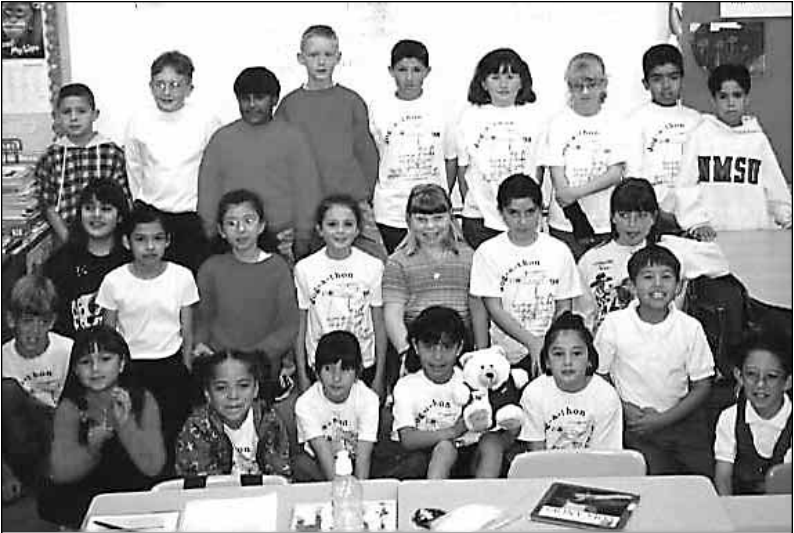
"I've been incredibly blessed in my life," she said. "This is a chance to give back to the community. Certainly I've gotten a lot more from my involvement than I've been able to give to the organization."

A huge reward is "to see some of the women grow; to know that some of the people you've worked with are going to be able to make it."

Leibert graduated from the Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville and holds an MBA from Texas A&M. She teaches English as a second language two nights a week, is an avid baseball fan, enjoys Houston's cultural offerings and is an enthusiastic traveler.

Other JSC award winners were Keith Day, Technical/Assistance Aid; Jack Anthamatten, Crafts, and John Young, Length of Service.

Leibert finds human resources work rewarding too. "It's neat to work in a place where people want to come to work," she said. "The people are great and it's exciting to be here." □



JSC Photos

Las Cruces Elementary students submitted the winning entry for Axon's name, and that of her backup, Yuri. Axon is in the front row.

Cub Scouts explore frontiers at Gilruth

When this year's theme for the annual Cub Scouts of America's Bay Area Council Twilight Camp turned out to be "Exploring the Final Frontiers," the use of JSC's Gilruth Center was a natural choice.

The camp, which featured five-hour evening sessions June 8-12 and a final overnight camp-out, allowed more than 300 elementary-aged Cub Scouts to have fun, work together and earn coveted honors that counted toward higher ranks.

It was the first time JSC had hosted the Cub Scouts, said Camp Director Elaine Stephens, a den leader with Pack 609 when not working as a control room design engineer in Engineering's Crew and Thermal Systems Division. The lure of NASA drew 30 percent more scouts than in any previous year.

"The kids really enjoyed it," Stephens said. "They asked to come back here next year. Like with every Cub Scout camp, this time of year it was hot. But the Gilruth was nice because we tried to do things under the trees."

Stephens and fellow Den Leader Phil Restivo, a Mission Control facility software integration manager for United Space Alliance who was camp sports event coordinator, were among about 20 NASA and contractor employees who participated in the event. More attended as parents.

Restivo said the scouts managed to cover at least 15 different achievements toward their next ranks. Examples included playing in different team sports, running fitness challenges such as the 50-yard dash, demonstrating accuracy with a bow and arrow or pellet gun, identifying different leaves and the trees they came from, launching seltzer rockets and running a "Mission to Io" obstacle course.

"There was a lot of support throughout NASA. We had a lot of paperwork and things to clear and it took six months, but JSC Center Director George Abbey was very supportive," Stephens said. "Safety worked with me and security and made it possible to conduct BB gun and archery target practice."



NASA Photo by Steve Candler

Astronaut Kevin Kregel talks to Cub Scouts at JSC's Gilruth Center during last week's Twilight Camp. The camp is a yearly camp for Cub Scout-aged children who participated in physical fitness, archery, pellet gun practice, engineering and science demonstrations during the late afternoon and early evening. JSC workers provided demonstrations on space suits, Mars exploration and space meteorology, and astronauts Kregel and Gerhard Thiele delivered talks and signed autographs.